

Fr. John's Homily, 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time November 7, 2021

JMJ CHS

I can remember when I was a little Catholic boy growing up in the faith in Dearborn that occasionally I would listen in on deep theological dinner table discussions that went something like this: "Those priests, they're always asking for money. If it's not one thing it's another. Is that all they think of?"

Comments like that from family and fellow Catholic friends and neighbors and relatives, I guess you could say, became part of the fabric of my life. Not that I ever gave it that much thought. That is, until that day in 1990, in my 40th year, when it became apparent to me that that was something that I, too, would be called upon to preach about in the not-too-distant future. And people would probably talk about me over the dinner table.

Now I have a lot of contact with many of you on a social level, but I do believe that this subject is something you might talk about among yourselves but would be reluctant to talk to me about. So while I don't hear many complaints directed at me about always asking for money, I am kind of curious about what is said behind closed doors. "Oh boy, here he goes again. If it's not the DSA, it's the Witness to Hope Campaign. And where is that canopy he promised us? And soon he will be pushing the *Loaves and Fish* campaign and he's always asking for money for that *St. Vincent de Paul Society*, and, of course, those missionary appeals every year for those poor people in Africa or Southern regions. And there is no shortage of natural disasters he collects for... And every now and then, he springs one of those "chasuble collections" on us. He almost challenges us to walk past him out there in the narthex with his vestment wide open, asking for funds? He's putting us on a Catholic guilt trip. It never seems to end!

Well to be perfectly honest with you, I have really never heard any complaints. I probably agonize more in my own heart about having to make the appeals than you do in your hearts about being asked to give to them.

No, as I have said so many times, Holy Spirit is a very generous congregation. You have supported many appeals without complaint. However.... It is not true of all. There are some here who do not put anything in the collection basket. To support the church, to pay its bills, or to assist in any of these other areas of need. They may have their reasons, their "explanations", and it is not my job to pass judgment. But stories like today's Gospel story, about *the widows mite*, is for them. The original Catholic guilt trip has its origins in this observation, given by Jesus himself.

As a matter of fact, it was just a few weeks ago that I saw a man, a man I did not recognize, get up, with his two boys, and leave, right in the middle of one of our appeals. I try not to judge in situations like this. You never know why a person is leaving,

but the timing seemed a bit odd. But I was told after Mass by one of the ushers that the man was overheard muttering something about not coming to Mass to be asked to give money to poor people. I felt badly for his two boys. What a bad example he gave them. Somebody ought to remind that man about what Jesus said about tying a millstone around the neck of some people when they corrupt the consciences of the little ones. So yes, the old attitudes still persist in the hearts of some good Catholics.

The inspiration for this talk came partially from a pamphlet written by a Catholic layman who lives in Ohio. Ben Scott is his name. He is a businessman, and owns at least one McDonald's. One of his heroes is Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, who he described as an extremely generous man and who was a great inspiration to him in the formation of his own attitude towards giving. This is the second time Mr. Scott has sent me this thing, free of charge. It is about giving. Maybe we should order them and make them available for those people who could benefit from his teaching.

He said that despite his growing sense of charity, he was not the least bit inclined to write a book. He didn't feel qualified. He wasn't equipped to speak on matters like this. But he did feel called. This could be a classic example of that idea that *God does not call the equipped, he equips the called*. So he ultimately obeyed. He sat down at his writing desk and he said the words just flowed. He looked at all of the passages in scripture that reflected heaven's attitudes toward giving.

Interestingly, his first quote was the one that we spoke about last week. *Love your neighbor as yourself*. The ways we can do that is to support our neighbor with our time, talent, and treasure. This is the concept of stewardship. The idea is that we are really only custodians of the wealth that God has blessed us with and that we are indeed called upon to share it with those in need.

Some of the Saints have been very good in this respect. Our own St. Vincent Depaul society was named after the great French Saint who is quoted in this week's bulletin. He said, "We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor in the arms of providence."

And Mr. Scott did say a few things about tithing. A lot of Catholics think tithing is actually a dirty word. It is from the old testament and the protestant churches have retained this as part of their approach to giving while Catholics have gone with the stewardship model. But I am sure you all know about the concept of tithing. It has to do with 10% off the top of your income. Another way of putting it is the giving of first fruits. I personally like this approach. It seems fair, and simple. It just requires trust.

And I have always felt that one of the scripture passages that encourages us to trust comes from Jesus in Luke's Gospel. "Give, and it will be given back to you, pressed down, shaken together, and flowing over...." I have heard this described as one of the

*laws of the kingdom* which literally is meant to describe how things really work, if we only trust.

But this is an agricultural image that the people of those times would have related to. They would wear their tunics to the market place and have them filled up with grain. And they would shake that vestment, and press the grain or veggies down so as to get as much as possible to take home. This analogy could be likened to my “Chasuable collections”. The lesson of the widow’s mite is no-brainer. I don’t have to elaborate on it. It is meant for those who have plenty of money to go around. Use it generously and wisely.

There are, however, a few basic points I would like to make today and it is partly because of personal experience.

First off, contributions to your church is a precept of the church. In other words, it’s a law, and laws should be obeyed. Churches are businesses and bills need to be paid.

Secondly, ask for help from the Advocate. Come Holy Spirit, tell me who to contribute to, and how much. Help me to discern. Help me to be wise. I can say this much, that the St. Vincent de Paul Society uses the money you donate very compassionately, and non-judgmentally, but also very wisely. They know that there are people out there who know the system and know how to milk it. The SVDP Society knows what they are doing. And they work closely with other charitable organizations locally.

And finally, don’t you all get a stack of mail every week from various organizations that are seeking donations? And, of course, they sell their list to others to make even more money for themselves. I find it quite irritating. And I find there is a potential to get jaded and even reduce my giving.

Finally, we have those people who are scammers. And some people have been taken to the cleaners by fast talkers who know how to take advantage of vulnerable people and relieve them of their life savings. This, of course, makes us all very angry and we run the risk of throwing up our hands and saying, “No one can be trusted. I’m not giving any more.”

But we have been given a warning about this from the Bible, the New Testament, and one of those many passages that warn about a time to come. It says: “A time will come when iniquity will grow to the point where the charity of the many will grow cold.”

I’ll leave you with that one last admonition. Don’t allow your charity to grow cold.

~Fr. John